

CORINNE.

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the cause of the felicity he had recently enjoyed in looking upon and hearing Corinne too poignantly recalled to him all that had once tempted him to rebel against that parent whose memory he now so idolized and whose wishes, now that he was no more, he had vowed should be his guiding principle through the life that remained to him.

The next day Count d'Erfeuil, who had been at the coronation in the Capitol, called upon Oswald and said: "My dear Oswald, would you like to visit Corinne this evening?" "How!" exclaimed Lord Nevil, "visit Corinne?" "Why, yes," answered the volatile Frenchman, "why not? I wrote this morning asking permission to visit her and bring you along with me this evening. Of course she has said yes, and, to the injury of my self-esteem, I may say that my note spoke more of myself than of you, but in her answer Corinne almost ignores me and speaks particularly of you. So come along; perhaps the conquest is for you and not for me after all."

Oswald was annoyed by the levity of the Frenchman, but he consented and that evening saw him at the house of Corinne. The house lay beyond the bridge of St. Angelo and was furnished with that correct taste and elegance which might have been expected. When Corinne appeared she bowed first to Count d'Erfeuil, though looking at Oswald, and then bowing again said with a perfect English accent, "Lord Nevil," repeating it twice as if that name was associated in her mind with some affecting reminiscence. Then she said a few words in Italian to thank him for restoring to her the crown.

"Am I a greater stranger to you than I was yesterday? Surely English is your native tongue—that which you speak to your friends." "I am an Italian," replied Corinne. "Forgive me, my lord, but I think I perceive in you that importance which so often characterizes your countrymen. Here we are most lowly; neither self-complacent, like the French, nor proud of ourselves, like the English. A little indulgence from strangers suffices us, and we have the great fault of wanting as individuals that dignity which is denied us as a nation. But when you know us you may find some traces of our former greatness, such as though few and half effaced, might be restored by happier times. I shall, now and then, speak to you in English, but Italian is more dear to me—I have suffered much," she added, sighing, "that I might live in Italy."

"In mercy," cried the Count, "speak French, dear Corinne; you are worthy to do so." She smiled at the compliment, and granted the request with ease. But the Count, who believed that he might say what he pleased, provided he did so with grace, imagining that politeness dwelt not in matter, but in manner, declared that she spoke French with an English accent, and put the direct question to her of the cause of this singularity. "During the four years that I have dwelt in Rome, monsieur," replied Corinne with dignity, "none of my friends, even those most interested in me, has inquired as to my history—they understood that it was painful for me to speak of it."

The Prince Castle Forte now arrived with many of their mutual acquaintances, men of lively and amiable minds, of kind and courteous manners, so easily animated by the conversation of others, so capable of appreciating all that is deserving of approval that they make the best listeners possible. The Italians are too indolent to display in society or, in fact, in any way, the wit of which they are really possessed. The generality of them cultivate not the intellectual faculties of their nature, but reveal them in the mental delights which are theirs without any trouble or their own. Corinne had all a Frenchwoman's sense of the ridiculous and evinced with all the fancy of an Italian. But she mingled with it such sweetness of temper that nothing appeared preconcerted or hostile—for in most things it is coldness which offends, while vivacity, on the contrary, has almost invariably the air of good nature.

Oswald found in Corinne a grace which he never before met. A terrible recollection of his life, it is true, was associated with a very lovely and gifted Frenchwoman, but Corinne in no way resembled her. But while Corinne fascinated him Oswald, when not in her presence, judged her after the standards which he had been accustomed to apply to women of his own country, and many doubts and misgivings perplexed him. In spite of this, however, and in spite of the fact that several times he resolved to fly from her witchery—did indeed absent himself for days from her house—the acquaintance begun at the Capitol and increased by his first evening by her side developed into an attachment to which he surrendered his whole being and which he felt was reciprocated by the mysterious poetess.

Under the guidance of Corinne, Lord Nevil saw the archaeological treasures of Rome and those wonders of art and architecture which are the

marvels of the world. She entertained him often at her country house at delightful Tivoli, and in her company he journeyed to Naples. Their close intimacy, while perfectly innocent, would, in any other country than Italy, have occasioned criticism of the most severe kind, and Oswald's English manner of thought told him that it was time full and free explanations were made on both sides. If Corinne's past held nothing which would render such a union impossible he wished to marry her, and Corinne had intimated unequivocally that if, when he knew the whole story of her life, he wished to make her his wife she would consider that she had attained the summit of earthly happiness.

But to reveal that past she showed a disinclination not unmixed with terror of the consequences of betraying such a knowledge to the man she now so passionately loved. On his part Oswald agreed to first make a statement of the life which had been his before meeting Corinne, and to divulge to her those haunting facts which had undermined his health and destroyed his peace of mind. It was at Naples that they came to this agreement and it was there that their mutual revelations were made. Oswald told his story first.

When he was scarcely more than a boy his father had picked out for him as his future wife Lucile Edgermond, the daughter of his fast friend, Lord Edgermond. She was a child then of tender years, and it was resolved that for a time Oswald should travel on the continent. In France he became acquainted with one Count Raimond, a young man the perfect model of French character in its old royalty, of French mind in its new cultivation. A warm friendship sprang up between the two. Oswald was fascinated by the giddy whirl of the life of Paris, where everything was so new and delightful to him. He knew, however, that his father, whose wish was his law, looked with distrust upon Parisian life and character and would not have prolonged his stay in the French capital had he not chanced to meet Raimond's sister, the widowed Countess d'Arbigny. Mme. d'Arbigny resembled her brother even in voice, but with her there was more of a retiring caution. Her countenance was very agreeable, her figure all grace and faultless elegance. She expressed herself on tender subjects as if trying to hide the feelings of her heart.

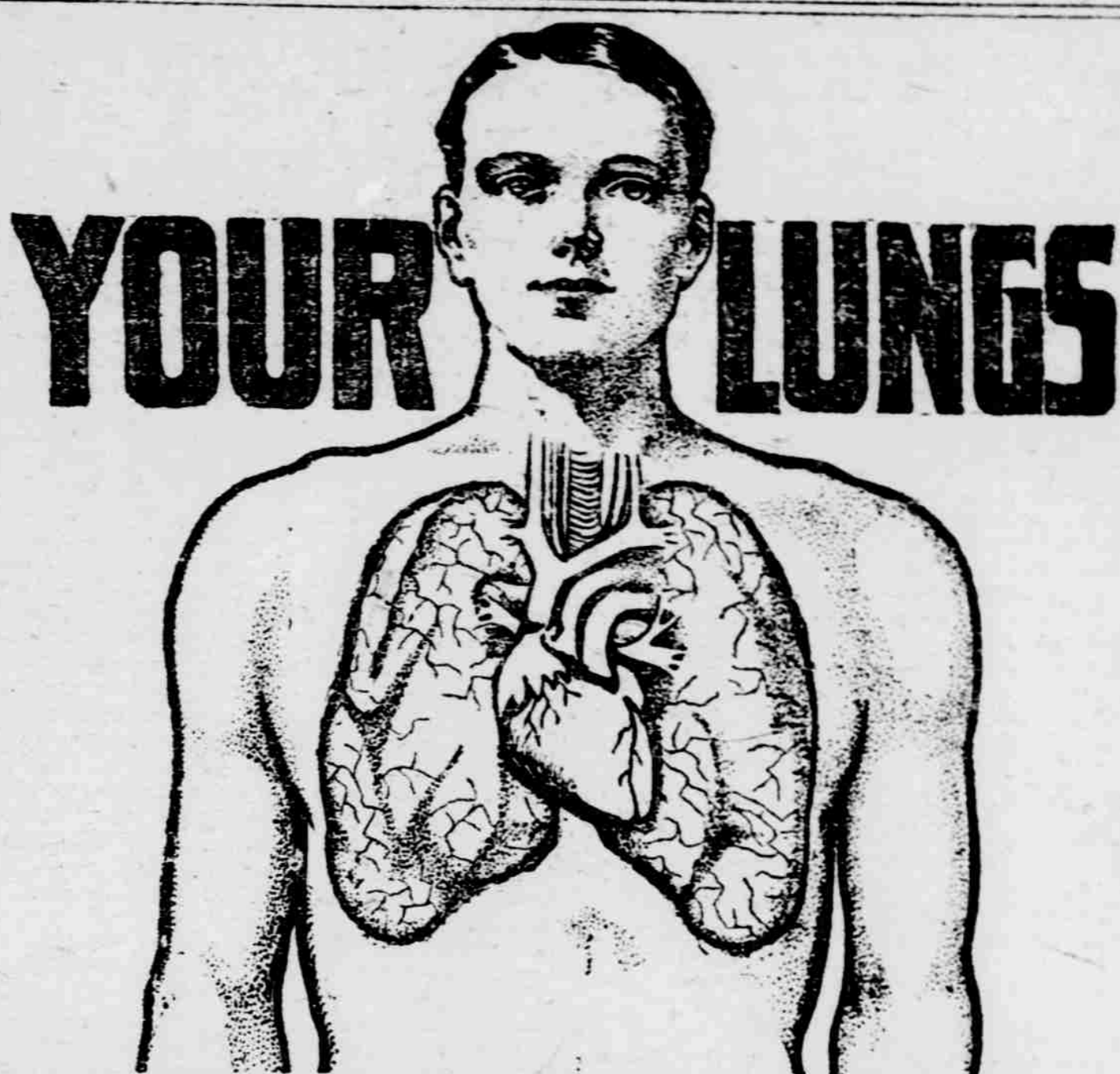
Young Oswald became at once much interested in the charming widow, but when he mentioned something of his feelings to Raimond the latter said bravely: "My sister's nature and mine are not congenial." After that Oswald never mentioned the Countess to his friend, though his intimacy with Mme. d'Arbigny increased to a point which alarmed even himself and made him reflect that what he was doing would surely meet with the strong disapproval of his father. If he stayed in France, however, he felt that he could not disengage himself from the entanglement.

He resolved to fly across the channel, and Raimond seemed glad that his friend was to return to England. In a few months, he said, he would be with him there. For France was then on the verge of the revolution which destroyed the old regime, and Raimond saw only too clearly the abyss which the nation was approaching. The revolution came. Oswald in London received a letter from Mme. d'Arbigny saying that her brother Raimond had perished in defending the Tuileries and that she herself was in extreme danger, though living under an assumed name in a country town. Raimond, she said, had taken his own fortune and hers with the intention of transferring them to Oswald in London. Had Oswald received the money? She conjured him by the affection which he once professed for her and by the regard he held for her brother to come to France and rescue her.

War was impending between revolutionary France and England, and Oswald had already entered the army. His father, he knew, would have forbidden his returning to France. But the call of the helpless woman could not be disregarded. Writing a hasty letter to his father, Oswald crossed the channel and found Mme. d'Arbigny. That wily woman had simply lured him to France. Her fortune proved to be safe, but she kept the young man dangling on and on until at length he found himself living with her as with a wife and struggling vainly to break the chains which bound him and return to England, whither his father had repeatedly by letter commanded him to repair.

When at length Oswald announced to Mme. d'Arbigny that he must and would return to England the woman burst into tears and said: "Would you, then, thus heartlessly desert me? Know, cruel man, that I have a secret to tell you. It will not be me alone that you abandon to fate if you fly now." And as she made this avowal she blushed and cast down her eyes. Oswald was beside himself, torn by conflicting emotions. But it seemed to him that under these circumstances his plain duty was to remain with Mme. d'Arbigny.

There was a relative of Mme. d'Arbigny's, one M. Maltigues, who was much in her society and upon whom she seemed to rely in all her business affairs. While Oswald was in the period of his greatest distress



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this man said to him: "For my part, if I were you, I would at least spare my friends the sight of my sufferings and myself their long faces of condolence. It is foolish of you to remain here where your life is threatened in so many ways." Oswald replied with some asperity, and one word bringing on another, Lord Nevil challenged Maltigues to a duel, which challenge the latter lightly accepted.

Before they went to the dueling ground Maltigues said: "You are a good fellow, Oswald, but Mme. d'Arbigny does not suit you. Your father would be in despair at such a match. My cousin wants to marry you, of course, but she is highly sagacious, even in love, and never fails to provide against the chance of being loved no longer. All this you will learn by her letters—here is the key to my desk—I bequeath the letters to you should I fall. It is much better, however, that I should live to marry madame than that you should return to England. However, I think after seeing the letters you will be convinced that my cousin and myself are much better mated than you would be with her."

Oswald was a much more expert swordsman than Maltigues and might have killed him. But he contented himself with slightly wounding and disarming him. "Well, well," said Maltigues, "you are a good fellow, as I said, and I want to do something for you in return for having spared my life. You shall have the letters anyway." Oswald read the packet of letters from Mme. d'Arbigny to Maltigues which the latter placed in his hands, and from them learned of the cold heartlessness of the woman and also that she had deceived him in her statement that she was about to become a mother. His dream shattered, he escaped from France and hastened to England.

But he arrived too late! His father had died a few days before, lamenting the absence and unfilial conduct of his son. Oswald felt then, and felt now, that he was a par-

ricide. He had resided for a time on his Scottish estates, and had seen Lucile Edgermond a few times. But she was still too young to think of marrying, and, though he had firmly resolved to fulfill his father's wishes in the matter, he felt some relief when his physicians ordered him to Italy for the benefit of his health. This was the story of his life up to the time he had met Corinne. Could she take him with this past behind him? Before he had met her he had not known what love was—but now he felt its full power.

STORY—FOUR

Oswald's revelations did not disturb the love and trust which Corinne had in him, and she, in return for his disclosures, placed in his hand a packet which contained a written statement of her own life. She was, it appeared, the daughter of Lord Edgermond by his first wife, an Italian woman of rank. Upon the death of her mother in Italy Lord Edgermond had returned to England and had married again. Corinne had then been removed from the custody of her Italian aunt and taken, with her Italian maid, to Lord Edgermond's country seat in Northumberland. For a while she had lived there in comparative content, and had busied herself in giving lessons in drawing, music and Italian to her half-sister, Lucile. But her father died, and her stepmother, who was utterly unable to understand the feelings and ambitions of the Italian-bred girl, became more and more reserved and cold toward her. Everything that Corinne did seemed to jar upon the nerves of her stepmother.

Corinne once spoke of her desire to return to Italy and to enter a public life as singer or authoress. Lady Edgermond was shocked, and told her that if she ever did such a thing it was due to the family that she should assume another name, and allow herself to be reported dead. Not long after Corinne did fly to Italy, accompanied only by her maid, and Lady

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